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Unvaxxed account for 92% deaths in India

Unvaccinated individuals accounted for 92 per cent of Covid deaths in India so far this year, the government said on Thursday. According to the Union Health Ministry, the country is in a "vaccine-protected low coronavirus phase" now and it is rational to open schools, colleges, and remove all restrictions while taking necessary precautions. High vaccination led to reduced morbidity and mortality due to Covid-19 in the recent wave, it said.

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
4 DAYS TO GO!
THINKEDU CONCLAVE
SASTRA

Direct talks with Putin only way to end war: Zelenskyy

Russia, Ukraine to create a humanitarian corridor to evacuate stranded people

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

AMID looming fears that the worst for Ukraine is yet to come, its president Volodymyr Zelenskyy sought direct talks with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, saying talks are the only way to end the war.

Zelenskyy's comment came soon after French President Emmanuel Macron's chilling assessment that the "worst is yet to come" for Ukraine after his 90-minute talk with Putin.

"We are not attacking Russia and we do not plan to attack it. What do you want from us? Leave our land," Zelenskyy said, addressing Putin. "Sit down with me. Just not 30 metres away like with (French President Emmanuel Macron)," the Ukrainian leader said, referring to Putin receiving world leaders at a now-famous enormously long table.

There was no immediate reaction from Putin.

Meanwhile, after a second round of talks on Thursday, Russia and Ukraine agreed to create humanitarian corridors for civilians fleeing the conflict zones. Russian negotiators said another round of talks would be held shortly.

In a major development, Russian forces captured the strategic port town of Kherson as Moscow's war entered the eighth day on Thursday.

Kherson is the first major city to fall after a three-day siege by the Russian troops left it short of food and water.

The fall of Kherson comes as Russian forces, facing fierce resistance in Kyiv and Kharkiv, made significant advances on Ukraine's southern front.

The Russian forces are now turning up the heat on Mariupol, another strategically vital port city located about 400 km east of Kherson. According to experts, it is a matter of time before Mariupol also falls as the city has been cut off from the rest of the country and is stripped of water and electricity in the midst of a harsh winter. The city's mayor claimed Russia was relentlessly bombing. "Today was the hardest, cruellest of the seven days of this war. Today they just wanted to destroy us all," he said.

Russia continued to bomb Kyiv and Kharkiv on Thursday, though Ukraine claimed it has stopped a large Russian military convoy from coming anywhere near Kyiv. P9,12

Indian students, evacuated from Ukraine, aboard an Indian Air Force C-17 Globemaster plane in Bucharest on Thursday | PTI

OIL PRICES NEAR $120

Oil prices briefly flirted with $120 per barrel on Thursday. Brent North Sea crude reached $119.84 per barrel, the highest level since early 2012, while WTI touched $116.57, last seen in 2008

18,000 INDIANS HAVE LEFT UKRAINE: MEA

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @New Delhi

ABOUT 1,000 Indians have left Kharkiv to nearby Pisochyn after the emergency advisory by the Indian embassy in Ukraine asking citizens to leave the city, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. Briefing reporters, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said the Indian side is in touch with both Ukrainian and Russian authorities to explore various ways to evacuate Indians.

"We are closely following the developments in Kharkiv, Sumy and other cities in eastern Ukraine. We are currently looking at transportation options to move them from there to western or southern Ukraine," Bagchi said.

According to MEA estimates, around 18,000 Indians have left Ukraine while 10,500 have reached India. Many of them are in countries bordering Ukraine such as Romania, Hungary and Poland.

Meanwhile, Russia has offered to evacuate Indian citizens stuck in conflict zones. Around 130 buses have already left for Kharkiv and Sumy from the Nekhoteyevka and Sudzha checkpoints in the Belgorod region, Russian media reported.

CM assures state students of safe return

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

MEDICAL students from Karnataka who are stranded in war-torn Ukraine on Thursday informed Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai about the difficulties they have been facing after the Russian invasion.

Explaining their ordeal, the students informed the Chief Minister that they had to walk for over 30 km from Kharkiv to reach a safe place. During the conversation, they also requested the Chief Minister to ensure that the evacuation process is expedited.

Bommai, who heard the students' grievances, assured them of all help and efforts by the State Government to bring the stranded back home safely.

"The Karnataka government is in constant contact with the External Affairs Ministry. We will extend all cooperation for your safe return. Concerted efforts are being made," Bommai told them. Among those who spoke to the CM were Gagan Gowda and a few others.

A note from the Chief Minister's Office said around 200 students from Karnataka are in Kharkiv.

CONTINUED ON: P4

Bommai's budget looks to make mark

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @Bengaluru

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai, who also holds the Finance portfolio, will present his maiden budget on Friday afternoon. It will be a tightrope walk for the CM to strike a balance between available resources and high expectations as regards development works and welfare schemes. |P4

EXPRESS READ

Protests in B'luru only at Freedom Park: HC

Bengaluru: Noting the effect of traffic jams on daily life, the Karnataka High Court on Thursday directed the State Government not to permit protests/processions/meetings anywhere in Bengaluru except at Freedom Park. |P2

Returnees may get seats in Indian colleges

RUSSIA'S MARCH TO KYIV

Russian forces have surrounded Kyiv after capturing nearby areas to the north of the Ukrainian capital. A large convoy of Russian forces is waiting to enter Kyiv after advancing from Belarus via Chernobyl. It is still 30 km away from the capital

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @New Delhi

WITH the fate of thousands of medical students returning from Ukraine hanging in the balance, sources said the Centre may consider accommodating them in India's medical colleges on humanitarian grounds. According to the sources, the government's focus right now is on bringing people back from Ukraine and it will look into the matter of the students' future soon.

"We may consider their situation. It is too early to say anything. But, on humanitarian grounds, something will be done, and it should be done," a source said.

Lav Agarwal, joint secretary in the Union health ministry, said, "We will do what best can be done for people returning from Ukraine."

This comes after the National Medical Commission was petitioned by several doctors' associations to consider the future of the students. The petitioners suggested that if it is difficult to accommodate them in India, then they should be transferred to colleges in other countries under a special provision.

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